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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [OIIP](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: (JUNE 11) TOKYO CONFERENCE

1. Summary. In the aftermath of the Tokyo Conference, Sri Lankan English and vernacular media was in high gear. Tamil newspapers ran positive headlines about Tokyo's outcome, but reflected concern about opposition party views of donor money. Tamil editorials encouraged the LTTE to return to peace talks and discussed the international community's interest in Sri Lanka. One Tamil editorialist observed, "It should be noted that the change of attitude of the Tigers in seeking solutions for the problems of the Tamil people and entering the democratic stream was a great give-in by the LTTE." State-owned television, radio and newspapers toed the optimistic government line. Opposition media headlines were sour, but editorials lacked their usual vitriol aimed at the international community. Independent media coverage of Tokyo's outcome was very positive. End summary.

2. LTTE statements and other Tamil reaction.

Tamil newspapers ran positive headlines about Tokyo's outcome, but reflected concern about opposition party views of donor money. Major dailies led with headlines about the interim administration and international encouragement of the peace process. Independent daily VIRAKESARI reported, "Government and Tigers should soon talk on interim administrative structure - Must find solutions on the basis of a federal system - Declaration at the Tokyo Conference." Independent daily THINAKKURAL elaborated, "Tokyo Conference invites Tigers to resume peace talks; Akashi will meet Balasingham in London; Japanese Ambassador in Sri Lanka will travel to Kilinochchi immediately," while pro-LTTE SUDAR OLI focused on Armitage's comments, "All should work with courage and achieve peaceful solution through talks."

The fate of donor money generated much consternation in the Tamil press. Pro-LTTE SUDAR OLI headlined, "Tokyo Conference wants GSL to assure that the funds allocated for NE will be spent in respective areas," while independent daily THINAKKURAL quoted Japanese Special Envoy Akashi, "Considerable amount of the aid received would be spent for NE."

Nearly all Tamil dailies paid special attention to People's Alliance Spokesman Sarath Amunugama's recent comments. Independent daily VIRAKESARI quoted him, "No benefits from Tokyo Conference; we will speak on this once we come to power." Independent daily, THINAKKURAL added, "PA worried that the Tokyo Conference has made the Sri Lankans bigger debtors."

Pro-LTTE TamilNet also featured Amunugama's remarks under the headline, "Tokyo donors' conference will not benefit Sri Lanka" -PA."

Block quote:

Sri Lanka's main opposition People's Alliance (PA) led by President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunge Tuesday said ninety percent of aid pledged at the Tokyo donors' conference are loans and not grants. "Majority of the aid given at the donors' conference are on various interest rates with several conditions attached," said People's Alliance media spokesman Mr. Sarath Amunugama at a press briefing held Tuesday at the office of the Leader of the Opposition.

End block quote.

Tamil editorials encouraged the LTTE to return to peace talks and discussed the international community's interest in Sri Lanka.

--- Under the headline, "Prime Minister's speech and the administrative structure," independent daily VIRAKESARI commented, "It should be noted that the change of attitude of the Tigers in seeking solutions for the problems of the Tamil people and entering the democratic stream was a great give-in by the LTTE."

Block quotes.

The LTTE alleges that the aid received for NE would not be

spent on NE. SIHRN, a body formed as a result of the peace talks is almost paralyzed. This made the Tigers to demand a powerful body with more authority to handle the aid that would be received.

The speech made by the PM has solutions for all these problems. SL Constitution is the barrier for all the progress. That is why the Tigers opted to go their way. It was a victory for the government when the LTTE agreed to a solution through peace talks. It should be noted that the change of attitude of the Tigers in seeking solutions for the problems of the Tamil people and enter the democratic stream was a great give-in by the LTTE. If lasting peace should dawn, both parties should be prepared to give-in more and more. Otherwise this will be an ongoing series forever.
End block quotes.

--- Under the headline, "Two things that the Tokyo Conference teaches," pro-LTTE daily SUDAR OLI chronicled the international community's interest in Sri Lanka and noted that the cooperation of the LTTE is necessary to reach a political settlement and reconstruct the north and east.

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It was possible to find out about the interest the international community has in the LTTE at the Tokyo Conference they boycotted.

While addressing the conference, the Prime Minister accepted the fault of the government and pointed out that action will be taken to establish a provincial administrative structure with the support of the international community. There's not much of a difference between an interim administrative structure and a provincial administrative structure. The international community has accepted the provincial administrative structure.

The Tokyo Donor Conference has stressed that government and the LTTE should jointly continue with peace talks and utilize the assistance provided by the international community in a proper manner for the reconstruction and development work.

The international community has given an assurance to grant USD 4.5 billion as aid instead of USD 3 billion that was expected. If there is progress in the peace efforts the international community will consider more aid. The international community is greatly interested in a peaceful Sri Lanka.

End block quotes.

13. GSL statements and pro-government reaction.

State--owned television, radio and newspapers toed the optimistic government line. One editorial addressed the impact of donor conditions on the peace process. State-owned English DAILY NEWS enthused, "Donors reaffirm commitment to rebuilding Sri Lanka," while state-owned Sinhala sister DINAMINA reported, "Message given by the Tokyo conference - a supportive tool for restoring peace-talks' says PM at the conclusion of the confab." The DAILY NEWS' positive coverage continued, "Tokyo a new beginning to re-energise peace process - PM," and "We will support you in quest for peace - Armitage."

Under the editorial headline, "Seizing the moment," state-owned English DAILY NEWS observed that donor considerations "should prompt both major parties in the peace process to carefully map out their future courses of action."

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In other words, the massive aid pledge is an unprecedented vote of confidence in Sri Lanka, on the part of the aid-giving community. Chief, of course, among the latter are Japan, the US and the EU. Clearly, the aid promised would be concretely realised only in tandem with tangible progress made in the peace effort. In other words, this is financial assistance with strings attached. Sri Lanka would need to provide proof that it is safely on the path to a negotiated settlement, if the promised donor funding is to be forthcoming. These considerations should prompt both major parties in the peace process to carefully map out their future courses of action. As far as the Government is concerned, it is abundantly clear that it would want to go ahead with the negotiating process. However, it is only fair that it is realised that the conditions on the ground should be conducive to a return to the negotiating table on the part of the LTTE. For instance, the development process in the North-East should get on to a fast track if the LTTE is to realise that it would be worthwhile giving the negotiations another try.
End block quotes

14. Opposition statements and pro-opposition reaction.

Opposition media headlines were sour, but editorials lacked their usual vitriol aimed at the international community. Independent, but nationalist-leaning, Sinhala daily DIVAINA reported, "LTTE boycotted confab to keep away from international human rights convention," and echoed the opposition's gripes about donor aid delivery, "PA spokesperson says 'Tokyo aid added to our debts.'" Sister paper English daily ISLAND detailed the same theme, "Per capita debt zooms to Rs. 95,000 after Tokyo Aid - PA," but softened its coverage with, "Donors pledges \$4.5 b at Tokyo confab - Aid above expectation and foundation for peaceful Lanka - PM." Independent Sinhala LANKADEEPA also covered the PA's comments, "[This is] not a gift from Santa - 95% aid is debt, per capita debt is 95,000- says Sarath Amunugama [PA-spokesperson]."

--- Independent, but nationalist-leaning, English daily ISLAND's editorial comment slammed the LTTE, but reversed its frequent criticism of the international community's involvement in the Sri Lanka's peace process. Under the headline, "Boycott boomerangs!" the ISLAND wrote, ".we do concede the conference has been a great accomplishment by those who put it together-- US Ambassador Ashley Wills, Japanese envoy Yasushi Akashi, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and Minister Milinda Moragoda. This support of the developed nations was . ice cold water on the hotheads of the LTTE who tried to hijack the conference by virtual blackmail of the Sri Lanka government and the donor nations."

Block quotes.

Despite this newspaper's reservations on foreign interference in this purely internal affair of this country and belief that foreign assistance is no panacea, we do concede the conference has been a great accomplishment by those who put it together-- US Ambassador Ashley Wills, Japanese envoy Yasushi Akashi, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and Minister Milinda Moragoda. This support of the developed nations was also ice cold water on the hotheads of the LTTE who tried to hijack the conference by virtual blackmail of the Sri Lanka government and the donor nations.

The reaction of the LTTE to the Tokyo Conference is not known at the time of writing but it would be extremely quixotic for this terrorist group to defy this well meaning and While reconstruction and rehabilitation is a process that can bring the two growling parties together, the hard nut to crack is the Eastern Province with Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese in near equal numbers. Till that issue is resolved it is apparent that a solution will not be forthcoming.

We have time and again said in this column that the basis on any agreement will be dependent on the consensus being reached between the UNF government and President Kumaratunga. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe has paid very statesmanlike compliments to President Kumaratunga at Tokyo and if this is responded to in the right spirit that elusive consensus may be reached.
End block quotes.

--- LAKBIMA, a strongly nationalist Sinhala daily, was unusually accommodating on its editorial page. Under the headline, "Assistance required for development," LAKBIMA commented, "What the country needs right now is not unconstructive criticism caused by political differences. It needs positive dialogue as to how we should use this aid appropriately. Being highly enthusiastic about the funds received is not enough. Proper development plans are needed. Mutual cooperation is essential. If everybody's goal is the country's development, it will not be difficult to work in unison."

15. Independent media reaction

Independent media coverage of Tokyo's outcome was very positive. Independent television and radio carried interviews with Deputy Secretary Armitage on both English and vernacular news programs. Independent Sinhala daily led with, "'Return to peace talks' - Tokyo confab's joint statement - 51 countries, 21 organizations say in unison to LTTE." Independent English DAILY MIRROR gushed, "World urges LTTE to resume talks - Clear and powerful message with whopping aid package of US\$ 4.5 billion," and "Overwhelmed Premier says 'Istuti, Nandri [thank you].'" DAILY MIRROR business coverage observed, "Ranil promises speed for aid projects," and "Private sector hails donor support." Independent editorialists were silent.
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